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Bangkok, 2–5 October 2018
Item 3 of the provisional agenda**
Major regional drug trafficking trends and countermeasures***

Regional and subregional cooperation in South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction: overview of main trends

1. According to the *World Drug Report 2018* by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Asia has the world's largest market for opiates, amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants. In 2016, approximately 11.2 million users of opiates lived in Asia, accounting for approximately 58 per cent of all users of opiates in the world (19.4 million). With regard to amphetamine-type and prescription stimulants, in 2016, Asia was home to 17.5 million users, representing roughly 51 per cent of the global total (34.2 million users).

2. Heroin and methamphetamine continue to be the major illicit drug threats in Asia and the Pacific. However, in South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, there are strong indications of a shift from opiates to synthetic drugs. Most indicators suggest that the illicit manufacture of, traffic in and use of methamphetamine in tablet and crystalline forms have expanded continuously over the last decade. Meanwhile, data for seizures, use and opium poppy cultivation in the region show decreases in the size of the regional heroin market.

3. In recent years, there have been clear indications of the presence of large-scale transnational drug trafficking groups that target multiple countries across South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific.

4. Transnational criminal groups, mainly from Asia and the Americas, continue to use the Pacific island countries and territories, not only as hubs for the trans-shipment of illicit drugs — including cocaine and methamphetamine and its precursor

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chemicals, primarily en route to Australia and New Zealand — but increasingly also as destinations.

5. A growing range of new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinone, continue to emerge on illicit markets across East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, and some of these substances have caused serious public health concerns.

6. The precursor detection rate in South Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia is extremely low and drug trafficking groups continue to use alternative precursor chemicals to circumvent national and international legislation. The use of alternative precursor chemicals presents a significant challenge to countries across the region, which is demonstrated by increasing amounts of various synthetic drugs, including methamphetamine, being produced and trafficked within and from the region to other countries. In addition, in East and South-East Asia, recent seizure trends of precursor chemicals are not corresponding to those of synthetic drugs, indicating that law enforcement authorities in the region have not been able to cope with increasing diversion and trafficking of precursor chemicals.

7. The *Afghan Opium Survey 2017* shows an unprecedented level of opium production in Afghanistan, which could serve to destabilize the region under analysis. From a health perspective, there is a concrete risk of an exponential growth in the use of opiates globally. From a security perspective, the opium production surplus offers financial opportunities for criminal organizations and terrorist groups to enhance their operations locally and globally.

8. The greatest drug-related challenges facing South Asia are trafficking in heroin; a rise in trafficking in and manufacturing of methamphetamine; diversion of controlled substances to illicit channels; smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; and insufficient coordination between drug enforcement agencies in the region. The recent trend indicates that synthetic drugs are replacing the natural and semi-synthetic drugs that have been abused for decades. In recent years, South Asia has experienced the impacts of the increasing use of the southern route (trafficking route that facilitates southerly flows of heroin out of Afghanistan), with larger seizures of heroin originating from Afghanistan. There have been more cocaine seizures in the region in the past few years than ever with reports from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, despite eradication efforts by the Government of Nepal, a considerable amount of illicit cannabis cultivation persists in the country.

9. The overall quantity of cocaine seized in Asia tripled from 2015 to 2016, while increasing 10-fold in South Asia during the same period. Overall, reporting of opiate seizures by European countries linked nine per cent of countries of origin, departure and transit to trafficking along the southern route over the period 2012–2016. Other new developments have been observed in South Asia: expansion of synthetic drug markets, with indications that amphetamine trafficking may be expanding in the near and Middle East, South-West Asia and North Africa.

10. Illicit drug trafficking continues to be the most lucrative form of crime in the region. The trafficking of opiates from the Golden Crescent is harmful to destination countries as well as those of origin and transit in South Asia. There are strong interlinkages between drug trafficking and the spread of crime, corruption, drug use and disorders, and HIV infection, with serious implications for the regional legal, political, economic and social stability.

II. Detailed assessment of production and trafficking trends

A. Regional developments

11. The market for illicit drugs, in particular, methamphetamine, continues to expand in East and South-East Asia. In 2016, seizures of methamphetamine amounted

to more than 61 tons in the region, marking more than a six-fold increase over the previous decade. Preliminary data from 2017 suggest a significant increase in the quantities intercepted, indicating there are no signs of a slowdown in the expansion of the methamphetamine market.

12. With nearly 30 tons seized in East and South-East Asia in 2016, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine decreased for the first time since 2010; however, it is the second highest amount on record. Countries in the Greater Mekong subregion accounted for about 75 per cent of all such seizures in 2016. According to preliminary figures for 2017, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine in the region amounted to 33 tons.

13. In 2016, nearly 330 million methamphetamine tablets were seized in East and South-East Asia, almost all of them in the Greater Mekong subregion. Neighbouring countries, such as Bangladesh and Malaysia, have seized increasing quantities of tablets in recent years. Preliminary data for 2017 indicate that seizures of the drug increased further, reaching 450 million tablets.

14. While seizures of methamphetamine have been on the rise in East and South-East Asia in recent years, seizures of its key precursor chemicals, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, have decreased. Seizures of the two chemicals in 2016 amounted to approximately 9.4 tons, reflecting a decrease of 60 per cent over 2015 and 75 per cent compared with 2014. Although this decreasing trend could be, in part, due to increases in the use of alternative methamphetamine precursor chemicals, including 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P), steep decreases in seizures of the two chemicals are of great concern, because they remain the most widely used precursors for the manufacture of methamphetamine in the region.

15. In recent years, the retail price of a methamphetamine tablet has decreased in several countries in East and South-East Asia, including Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Thailand, while seizures of the drug in the region significantly increased, indicating the intensified scale of production for the drug.

16. The Pacific islands are continuously used as a transit point for drug trafficking. Methamphetamine and precursor chemicals from Asia and cocaine from the Americas are trafficked to and through the Pacific. Australian national authorities seized 700 kg of cocaine trafficked through French Polynesia in November 2017. In addition, Pacific countries are used for producing methamphetamine.

17. Perceived increases in consumption and manufacturing capacity as well as increased seizures point to a growing market for crystalline methamphetamine in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific. In those regions, methamphetamine has long been available in the form of both crystalline methamphetamine and methamphetamine tablets, but crystalline methamphetamine use has now become a key concern.

18. Heroin remains a persistent challenge in East and South-East Asia, although available data may indicate that the market demand is decreasing. According to the *Myanmar Opium Survey 2017*, the total area of opium poppy cultivation in the country decreased significantly in 2017 to 41,000 hectares (ha), down 25 per cent from the 55,500 ha recorded in 2015. Similar to the opium poppy cultivation trend, seizures of heroin also decreased from more than 12 tons in 2015 to about 10 tons in 2017, according to preliminary data.

19. No change has been observed in seizures of "ecstasy" (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)) over the last three years in East and South-East Asia, with about 1 ton seized per annum. However, a few countries in the region, including Singapore and Thailand, have reported a higher purity of "ecstasy" tablets compared with years prior to 2014, while data for prices have been stable. The lack of price fluctuation might indicate that precursor chemicals for the drug have become more readily available. In addition, tablets sold as "ecstasy" in the region contain various substances other than 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, including new psychoactive substances.

20. There are strong indications of the expansion of the cocaine market throughout the whole of Asia, because seizures of the drug in the region have increased significantly. For example, the quantity of cocaine seized in Asia tripled from 2015 to 2016, with most growth reported in South Asia, where the quantity seized increased 10-fold, and in East and South-East Asia.

21. A growing range of new psychoactive substances, including synthetic cannabinoids, has been observed in East and South-East Asia. In total, 502 different new psychoactive substances — most possessing a stimulant effect — were reported by countries in East and South-East Asia between 2008 and 2016. This might reflect the existence of a large market for stimulants in the region, which is dominated by methamphetamine. However, the use of such substances in the region is not considered to be widespread, and the new psychoactive substances reported in the region might not necessarily be intended for the regional markets, because East and South-East Asia are frequently perceived as a major source or origin of new psychoactive substances detected and/or used in other regions.

22. Some of the new psychoactive substances found in the region have caused serious public health concerns. For instance, authorities in New Zealand issued a warning, following at least seven deaths that occurred in Auckland in July 2017, all of which involved the use of synthetic cannabinoids.

23. In 2016, seizures of ketamine in East and South-East Asia declined significantly, which was largely the result of a massive drop in quantities seized in China, including Hong Kong, China. However, other countries in the region, including Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand, reported relatively large quantities of ketamine seized in 2016. Malaysia also dismantled the first clandestine laboratory ever detected on its territory.

24. Several countries in East and South-East Asia, including China, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam, have been targeted as transit countries for khat originating in Africa. Viet Nam has reported large amounts of khat seizures since 2016. In March 2017, Viet Nam authorities seized 2.6 tons of khat in Hai Phong.

B. National developments

25. The latest wastewater drug monitoring programme report of Australia confirms that methamphetamine remains the most widely consumed illicit drug in the country. The same report estimates that about 8.4 tons of the drug are used in the country annually. In addition, it is important to note that there has been a change in the preferred forms of methamphetamine used in the country. According to national surveys conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, in 2010, 22 per cent of people reported as methamphetamine users were crystalline methamphetamine users. In 2016, that figure increased to 57 per cent.

26. In Bangladesh, methamphetamine in tablet form is the main drug abused in the country. Tablets are smuggled from Myanmar through its south-east border. Seizures have been consistently increasing, from 120,000 tablets in 2009 to over 40 million tablets in 2017. The western and northern borders of Bangladesh are used for trafficking of heroin, phensedyl and buprenorphine. Since 2007, the number of amphetamine-type related arrests and seizures has been on the rise.

27. Codeine-based cough syrups are so widely abused in Bangladesh that that country has banned the production and sale of such syrups on its territory. However, owing to their legal availability in India, they are smuggled in large quantities through land and river routes. Ease of availability, low risk perception and compatibility with both smoking and non-smoking populations have led to their popularity among drug users in Bangladesh. The seizures of codeine-based cough syrups declined in 2016 but increased in 2017, with a seizure of 720,843 bottles.

28. Most of the heroin seized in Bangladesh is trafficked from India into Bangladesh through its western and eastern borders. However, good-quality heroin sourced from

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the Golden Triangle occasionally enters the country by way of its south-eastern coastline, mostly for further shipment to Europe and America by sea. The upward trend in the seizure of heroin in the country continued in 2017, with an increase of more than 150 per cent from the previous years, reaching 401.63 kg.

29. Cannabis is the most commonly abused drug in Bangladesh and is mainly smuggled into the country from India. In addition, illicit cultivation of cannabis in remote areas of Bangladesh has been reported. Seizures of cannabis in Bangladesh have been showing an upward trend since 2013, increasing from 47,104 kg in 2016 to 69,989 kg in 2017.

30. Cannabis is the most common drug abused in Bhutan, smuggled into the country from India, along with small quantities of low-quality heroin. The number of cases recorded for drug offences increased from 316 in 2016 to 555 in 2017. During 2017 and the first half of 2018, Spasmo Proxyvon Plus capsules were seized in large quantities: 130,316 capsules in 2017, and 40,380 capsules in the period from January to June 2018. In addition, seizures of correction fluid and thinners were reported.

31. The abuse of pharmaceutical preparations — benzodiazepines in particular, such as diazepam and nitrazepam — that contain controlled narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances pose an increasing threat in Bhutan. The abuse of codeine-based cough syrups has also been reported. Pharmaceutical preparations are mainly smuggled from India.

32. According to the Narcotics Control Bureau of Brunei Darussalam, crystalline methamphetamine is the primary drug of concern in the country, followed by cannabis. A total of 91 per cent of persons arrested for drug use in 2017 had used crystalline methamphetamine. Authorities in Brunei Darussalam have noted that the use of ketamine and nimetazepam has increased in the country, which is also reflected in the amount of those drugs seized in the first half of 2017.

33. Cambodia has been increasingly used as a transit point for methamphetamine, and the use and availability of that substance continue to increase in the country. In recent years, the total number of arrests for drug-related offences in Cambodia has increased almost 10-fold, from 1,830 in 2013 to 17,800 in 2017, according to the National Authority for Combating Drugs. That increase is in part the result of the new Government approach, which puts more emphasis on law enforcement measures. In addition, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine in 2017 amounted to 80 kg, the highest on record. It is also important to note that authorities in Cambodia seized 120 kg of methamphetamine trafficked from the Lao People's Democratic Republic in June 2018, the largest methamphetamine trafficking case ever reported by Cambodia.

34. The popularity of synthetic drugs in China has risen in recent years. Based on data from the National Narcotics Control Commission of China, about 80 per cent of newly registered drug users between 2015 and 2017 were using synthetic drugs, indicating that those drugs have replaced opiates as the primary drug group of concern in the country. By the end of 2017, there were nearly 2.553 million registered drug users in China, and of the total registered drug users, 1.538 million (or 60.2 per cent) were synthetic drug users.

35. A large number of clandestine drug manufacturing facilities are dismantled each year in China. In 2017, China investigated 597 cases related to illicit drug production and dismantled 317 drug manufacturing sites, seizing 23.3 tons of various drugs. The number of drug manufacturing sites dismantled in 2017 was nearly 30 per cent lower than in 2016. The Government of China has noted that illicit drug production activities migrated from key areas such as Guangdong and Fujian to other regions, including border areas, making it more complex to address related challenges.

36. In India, there was a 10-fold increase in the quantity of amphetamine-type substances seized in 2016, to 1,687 kg, compared with 2015, followed by a marked reduction in 2017, down to 95 kg. In August 2018, the seizure of 130,000 tablets of methamphetamine was reported in north-east India. Heroin seizures in the country have been increasing since 2014. In 2017, they were reported to be 2,146 kg,

compared with 1,675 kg in 2016, making it the largest amount of seized heroin reported in the past several years. The downward trend in opium seizures in India that had been witnessed since 2012 came to a halt in 2016. That year, seized quantities increased by more than 30 per cent (2,251 kg) and remained stable in 2017. At the same time, the quantities of morphine seized witnessed a 16-fold increase, from 28 kg in 2016 to 449 kg in 2017. In June 2018, the seizure of 308 kg of ketamine was reported. This represented a huge increase since 2016, when the nationwide seizure of ketamine was 68.06 kg.

37. The eradication of illicit opium crops by national agencies in India rose from 3,461 acres in 2015 to 8,878.89 acres in 2018. The illicitly cultivated area eradicated by May 2018 was the largest in the past five years.

38. The quantity of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine seized in India witnessed a sharp rise, from 827 kg in 2015 to 2,990 kg in 2017. Seizures of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine trafficked from India into Myanmar for the purpose of precursor extraction continued to be reported.

39. Hashish seizures in India increased, reaching 2,943 cases in 2017. In addition to domestic production, Nepal is a major source of hashish.

40. In February 2018, authorities in Indonesia made two seizures of crystalline methamphetamine (1.6 tons and 1 ton) from trafficking attempts by vessel in which persons from Taiwan Province of China were on board. Seizures of methamphetamine in Indonesia remained high at more than 3.6 tons, the second-largest quantity reported from the country. That amount was partially due to a large-scale trafficking case involving nearly 1 ton of the drug reported in July 2017. Several trafficking cases reported in recent years in East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific denote that drug trafficking groups from Taiwan Province of China have been playing a significant role in large-scale methamphetamine manufacturing and trafficking in the regions.

41. In recent years, large quantities of crystalline methamphetamine have been seized in Japan according to its national police agency. In 2016, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine were about 1.5 tons, the largest amount since 2010. In 2017, seizures of the drug totalled 1.1 tons. The steep increase in seized quantity of that drug in recent years is the result of seizures of several large shipments originating overseas. The national authorities of Japan seized 350 kg and 480 kg of crystalline methamphetamine in April and August 2017.

42. At 142 kg, the quantity of crystalline methamphetamine seized in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 2017 was the second highest ever reported in the country. The Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision reported to UNODC that the most significant case involved 109 kg of methamphetamine and occurred in November 2017 in Bokeo province, bordering Myanmar and Thailand. Between 2006 and 2012, no seizures of crystalline methamphetamine were reported in the country.

43. There has been a significant change in the illicit drug market in Malaysia. For instance, for the first time in 2017, the number of identified methamphetamine users in Malaysia surpassed that of opiate-based drugs (heroin and morphine), according to data from the national anti-drug agency. A total of 10,419 methamphetamine users were detected in 2017, an increase of 3.1 per cent, compared with 10,017 in 2016. During the same period, the number of heroin and morphine users decreased by 40 per cent, from 16,895 to 10,154.

44. The maritime southern route is gaining importance in South Asia as some of the largest heroin seizures outside the source region have been made on that route. Maldives has also emerged as a transit point for drug trafficking that takes place through seaports and airports. However, increased smuggling using the postal system has been reported in 2017 and 2018. Expatriate workers in Maldives are often used as carriers and peddlers for trafficking. During 2018, Maldives witnessed an increase in seizures of methamphetamine, "ecstasy", cannabis and heroin.

45. There is strong evidence that methamphetamine production in the Golden Triangle has intensified. In January 2018, the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control of the police force of Myanmar reported to UNODC seizures, in Kutkai township in Shan State, of 1.75 tons of crystalline methamphetamine, 30 million methamphetamine tablets and 200 kg of caffeine, which is used as a methamphetamine tablet cutting agent. In addition, neighbouring countries of Myanmar reported record amounts of methamphetamine seizures in 2017, corresponding to the expanded drug production in the Golden Triangle.

46. Reductions in the opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar have been most significant in East Shan and South Shan, with decreases of 37 and 29 per cent, respectively. However, the report also reveals that although progress has been made, North Shan and Kachin States have seen reductions of less than 3 and 7 per cent, respectively, which on the ground amounts to a decrease of only 600 hectares in total, reconfirming the link between conflict and opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar.

47. In Nepal, drug seizures for 2017 include 3,734 kg of cannabis, 1,372 kg of hashish, 69 kg of opium, and 4 kg each of heroin and cocaine. Through May 2018, the annual seizures include 1,781 kg of cannabis, 932 kg of hashish, 7 kg of opium, and 1 kg each of heroin and cocaine. In 2017, the most popular pharmaceutical preparations seized were diazepam (49,304 tablets), buprenorphine (31,567 tablets) and khat (8 kg).

48. In New Zealand, quantities of methamphetamine seized increased significantly, from 15 kg in 2013 to 986 kg in 2016, based on data reported to UNODC through the annual report questionnaire. The largest quantities of methamphetamine seized at the border in 2016 originated in China (including Hong Kong, China), followed by Thailand. At the same time, more than 1.2 metric tons of ephedrine were seized in the country in 2016, the highest on record. Such a large seizure is inconsistent with the number of illicit methamphetamine-manufacturing facilities dismantled in New Zealand, which has decreased continuously in recent years.

49. According to data from the Dangerous Drugs Board of the Philippines, approximately 1 metric ton of crystalline methamphetamine was seized in 2017. Although that amount represented a 54 per cent decrease compared with 2016, it was still the second-largest amount seized over the last decade. More than half of the total amount seized in 2017 was the result of a single trafficking case. The case involved more than 600 kg of the drug, which originated in China and was seized in Valenzuela City in May 2017.

50. Recent data for seizures, use, arrests, treatment admissions and prices indicate the expansion of the crystalline methamphetamine market in the Republic of Korea. According to the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of that country, seizures of crystalline methamphetamine for the first five months of 2018 in the country (29 kg) already reached a level similar to the amount of the drug seized in 2017. At the same time, source countries of the crystalline methamphetamine trafficked to the Republic of Korea have diversified in recent years.

51. According to the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore, in 2017, a total of 3,089 drug users were arrested in the country, of whom 1,989 (64 per cent) used methamphetamine and 847 (27 per cent) used heroin. About 80 per cent of all newly identified drug users (1,249) were methamphetamine users, while heroin only accounted for 4 per cent of the total. In 2017, seizures of methamphetamine in the country remain high at 21.4 kg, all of which was destined for the local drug market.

52. The close proximity of Sri Lanka to the two major illicit opiate-producing regions — the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent — attracts the attention of international drug cartels. Cannabis and heroin are the main illicit drugs abused in Sri Lanka. Cannabis is the only plant-based drug illicitly cultivated locally. Between January and May 2018, approximately 2,213 kg of cannabis and over 30 kg of heroin were seized.

53. Abuse of psychotropic substances is becoming a significant problem in Sri Lanka. People become addicted to one or more of these substances, either after medical use or to evade withdrawal symptoms of heroin addiction when it is not available on the market. Although these substances are controlled medicines, they seem to be freely available on the black market.

54. The total quantity of heroin and cannabis seized in Sri Lanka were 314.955 kg, and 4,987.61 kg, respectively, and 220.697 kg of cocaine was seized in 2017. The main trafficking routes are sea routes from southern India (heroin originating from India) and Pakistan (heroin originating in Afghanistan). The preferred route for smuggling from southern India into Sri Lanka has been the sea lanes between the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait, in particular through the port of Tuticorin. Bulk quantities of heroin arrive by sea with the support of fishermen working with drug smugglers from southern India.

55. With the intensified methamphetamine production in the Golden Triangle, the amount of methamphetamine seized in Thailand in 2017 increased significantly compared with previous years. According to the Office of Narcotics Control Board of Thailand, in 2017, more than 7.5 metric tons of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in the country, which is by far the largest quantity ever reported by that country. In addition, nearly 240 million methamphetamine tablets were seized in the country in that year, which is also a record amount. Considering several recent major methamphetamine seizures reported by the country, seizures of methamphetamine in 2018 will likely be higher than in 2017.

56. According to the Standing Office on Drug Control of Viet Nam, heroin remains the primary drug of concern in that country. In 2016, approximately 75 per cent of registered drug users were heroin users. However, the synthetic drug market in the country continues to expand and diversify, and crystalline methamphetamine use seems to be on the increase across the country. In 2017, Viet Nam authorities seized 857 kg of crystalline methamphetamine, together with 1 million methamphetamine tablets. In addition, authorities in Viet Nam also dismantled sites related to the manufacture of illicit methamphetamine, "ecstasy" and synthetic cannabinoids.

III. International cooperation

A. Regional conferences and meetings on drug control

57. The twenty-second Asia-Pacific Operational Drug Enforcement Conference was held in Japan in February 2018 to discuss the current drug situation in the Asia-Pacific region. The aim of the conference was to strengthen information exchange and cooperation, with a special focus on transnational criminal groups trafficking in methamphetamine and new psychoactive substances in the region.

58. In September 2018, the twenty-eighth Anti-Drug Liaison Officials' Meeting for International Cooperation was held in the Republic of Korea, with the participation of representatives from Asia, the Pacific and Europe, as well as UNODC. Participants discussed emerging challenges posed by illicit drugs, including new psychoactive substances identified in the region.

59. In July 2018, the sixth operational workshop of the Drug Monitoring Network of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held in Thailand, with the participation of all ASEAN members as well as representatives of the ASEAN secretariat and the Substance Abuse Academic Network of Thailand. The main purpose of the workshop was to review and monitor the ASEAN drug situation as well as to exchange information among ASEAN members, which leads to the formulation of the ASEAN Drug Monitoring Report 2017.

60. The thirty-ninth meeting of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters and its related meetings were held in Brunei Darussalam in August 2018. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation at the regional level in the

framework of the ASEAN Workplan on Securing Communities against Illicit Drugs 2016–2025.

61. The tenth Asia Forensic Science Network Annual Meeting and Symposium were held in Singapore in September 2018 on the theme of new technologies, new methods and new challenges. The meeting provided a forum for forensic experts from Asia and other regions to learn about and discuss the latest advancements in forensic science, including measures to better detect and identify new psychoactive substances.

62. The South Asia Senior Expert Group Meeting was organized in March 2018 in New Delhi, pursuing the establishment of the South Asian Regional Intelligence and Coordination Centre (SARICC). Senior officials from law enforcement agencies and Ministries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka attended the meeting. The SARICC platform is aimed at strengthening regional cooperation against transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking. In March 2018, South Asia SARICC experts took part in a study visit to Almaty, Kazakhstan, to visit the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre.

63. The fifth meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and the meeting of the Sub-Group on Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursor Chemicals, were held in Kathmandu in May 2018.

B. Cooperation between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Governments of the region

64. In 2018, UNODC provided 872 field drug and precursor identification kits to law enforcement in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The provision was a part of an integrated law enforcement support plan under the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control that brings together six countries in East and South-East Asia — namely, Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam — to address the threat of illicit drug production, trafficking and use. These kits have supported the capacity of front-line drug law enforcement to swiftly identify suspected drugs and precursors, assisting them in taking on-site response appropriately, following the detection of suspicious substances. Training sessions were conducted on the usage of the identification kits in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam, with the goal of building the capacity of the law enforcement agencies of those countries to effectively use the kits that UNODC had provided. Also, in 2018, UNODC provided 20 crime scene investigation kits to law enforcement authorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion as part of the front-line equipment support initiative under the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control. The need for tools at the border area to investigate drug crime scenes had been identified as a priority by the countries involved in the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control and investigation kits were delivered in accordance with this request.

65. UNODC supported the establishment of the first trilateral Border Liaison Office at the border shared by China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. The liaison office works to improve cross-border coordination between drug law enforcement agencies in the border area, and increases their ability to collect, analyse and disseminate information. There are now 76 such offices operating in the Mekong Subregion, including the trilateral office, with another 14 being planned.

66. The annual focal point meeting of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control was held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, on 1 and 2 February 2018. During the meeting, participants reviewed the implementation of the 2017 activities of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control and discussed the workplan and implementation activities for 2018. Logistical arrangements for future activities and meetings were also discussed and agreed upon.

67. Under the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control, UNODC facilitated a side event at the sixty-first session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, held in Vienna, to discuss changes in the Golden Triangle's drug market and the impact of the ongoing shift in the region from the production of opiates to synthetic drugs.

68. UNODC designed and carried out training courses on investigation techniques for Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. These training sessions were conducted between January and August 2018 in each country, with 25 to 30 front-line law enforcement officers participating in each training. Additionally, law enforcement authorities from China received training on advanced online investigation and digital forensic techniques in Shanghai, China. Each training built law enforcement capacity related to conducting drug investigations and search procedures. The topics covered were in line with the priorities laid out by the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control for 2018.

69. A workshop on the mapping of drug trafficking routes was held in Ho Chi Minh City on 2 and 3 April 2018. It facilitated the sharing of data and intelligence and provided a forum through which Greater Mekong Subregion countries were able to present national drug trafficking trends and connect these trends across borders. The workshop resulted in a consensus regarding the general trafficking trends in the region, and findings that informed the development of an internal operation analysis for law enforcement decisions.

70. Under the framework of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control, the UNODC Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific developed a training toolkit entitled "Community-based Services for People Who Use Drugs in South-East Asia". Several Member States have adopted and adapted the toolkit, which is now available in Burmese, Chinese, Khmer, Laotian, Thai and Vietnamese. Several training sessions on community-based services for people who use drugs have been conducted. From 9 to 11 April, a training session was conducted in the Philippines with staff from the local government as well as civil society and law enforcement sectors. The session was aimed at building the capacity of participants for increased understanding of drug dependence and care as well as improved service delivery.

71. Promotional activities on the *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention* were held in the Philippines on 12 and 13 April 2018. Representatives from the departments of education and health, authorities from local government, members of faith-based organizations and civil Society, and the Dangerous Drugs Board gathered to discuss how drug use prevention strategies that are based on scientific evidence can be implemented in the Philippines.

72. The Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control held a Senior Officials Committee meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, from 21 to 25 May 2018. On that occasion, in addition to reviewing the overall progress regarding the implementation of the subregional action plan, participants agreed upon priority areas for 2019, which include the following: precursor control, with a special focus on investigative capacity-building, and law enforcement capacity related to online drug trafficking, maritime drug trafficking and drug treatment.

73. A representative of UNODC, as well as senior officials from Cambodia, China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, travelled to Shan State, Myanmar, on 24 May 2018, in order to meet with former and current opium-growing farmers and community leaders engaged in UNODC alternative development programmes. The visit connected senior regional policymakers with opium-growing communities to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and to discuss best practices for implementing alternative development and sustainable livelihoods programmes in the area. The field visit was arranged jointly by UNODC and the Government of Myanmar.

74. A training for border liaison officers on standard operating procedures for drug law enforcement was held in Pingxiang, China, from 10 to 13 July 2018. The training session reviewed guidelines and best practices for cross-border cooperation and provided practical training on how to apply the standard operating procedures of border liaison offices in the field. The objective of the training session was to empower border liaison officers from China, so that they might engage more with their cross-border counterparts, and to increase the capacity of these officers to carry out investigations upon receiving intelligence.

75. A Greater Mekong Subregion Customs joint operation named the "Mekong Dragon" was supported by the UNODC Regional Office for South-East Asia and the Pacific, in partnership with the regional intelligence liaison offices of Asia and the Pacific of the World Customs Organization, through the organization of the initial meeting in Hangzhou, China, on 7 and 8 August 2018. The operation, which is to continue until February 2019, is working to facilitate enhanced information and intelligence exchange between countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion and to support customs agents to intercept cross-border movements of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals.

76. The UNODC Regional Representative for South-East Asia and the Pacific participated in the thirty-ninth Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters, held in Brunei Darussalam. UNODC delivered a presentation on the latest regional drug trends and the responses of the Office to the shifting drug situation in the region. Additionally, UNODC worked to facilitate greater cooperation between ASEAN and China, advocating for holistic, evidence-based solutions to the drug problems facing South-East Asia and East Asia.

77. As a direct follow-up to the first national workshops, held in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in 2017, the UNODC global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme organized two national technical workshops for the countries, respectively. These workshops brought together representatives of various national authorities and civil society organizations involved in the fight against illicit drugs, and were composed of training and open-discussion sessions aimed at enhancing the capability of illicit drug data collection in the countries. In addition, UNODC assisted the countries in the establishment of national coordination mechanisms, which will be used to centralize data that are related to illicit drugs and that have been generated across national authorities.

78. The UNODC global SMART programme participated in the third National Narcotics Committee meeting of Fiji with a request from the Government of that country. At the meeting, UNODC briefed global and regional illicit drug use and trafficking patterns as well as challenges posed by new psychoactive substances, a growing concern for the country.

79. The SMART programme organized its annual regional workshop in Thailand in August 2018. The workshop was attended by representatives of all ASEAN member States, neighbouring countries in East Asia and the Pacific, to share recent production, use and trafficking patterns and trends in synthetic drugs. In addition, the programme introduced several drug demand indicators for the region to address the lack of drug use and demand data in the region.

80. In May 2018, enforcement, justice, economic and diplomatic senior officials from South-East Asia gathered at the seat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in Bangkok, to discuss regional integration and challenges posed by crime, as well as improvements to border management to help to secure the region. The meeting was organized by the Government of Thailand and UNODC, and its key objective was to build up momentum for improving the management of regional borders to mitigate transnational crime.

81. Between 2014 and 2016, the Governments of Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka joined the UNODC Global Container Control Programme, which includes

... air cargo component, with a view to enhancing capacity to counter traffic in illicit ...igs and precursors through seaports and airports.

...2. In 2016, with the aim of enhancing the capacity of drug regulatory authorities ...nd drug law enforcement agencies to counter diversion and internal and cross-border ...affic in prescription drugs containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances ...nd their preparations, the UNODC Regional Office for South Asia, in collaboration ...ith the trade and industry sectors, conducted expert assessments of pharmaceutical ...eparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in Bangladesh, ...dia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The key objectives of the assessments were to: (a) assess ...he nature and extent of the abuse of pharmaceutical preparations in the region; ...) assess the adequacy of prevalent legal and policy regimes governing the abuse of ...maceutical drugs in the region; (c) assess the organizational, regulatory and ...forcement capacities of the concerned agencies; and (d) identify gaps in the legal ...gime and their organizational capacity.

...3. In 2016 and 2017, UNODC conducted training sessions in Bangladesh, India, ...aldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka aimed at building the capacity of law enforcement ...encies to control traffic in pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs ...d psychotropic substances. In addition, awareness-raising workshops were ...ganized for representatives of the pharmaceutical trade and industry sectors, with a ...iew to promoting self-regulation and preventing the diversion and abuse of that type ...f drug.

...4. UNODC assisted Member States in South Asia with building the capacity of ...eir forensic laboratories with regard to testing methods and the identification of new ...sychoactive substances and, accordingly, assisted key national laboratories in the ...gion to register with the UNODC International Collaborative Exercises programme ...o allow them to assess their performance and take corrective actions, when ...ppropriate.

...5. In 2017, UNODC launched a project to reduce drug-related problems by ...facilitating and strengthening the engagement of law enforcement agencies with drug ...er communities. The project is planned to be implemented in close coordination ...th Government officials in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar and Nepal.

...6. In 2017, UNODC also began the implementation of a new project to strengthen ...oss-border cooperation between Bangladesh and Myanmar to counter drug ...afficking.

...7. The UNODC Regional Office for South Asia developed the new Regional ...rogramme for South Asia (2018–2021), in close consultation with member States in ...at region. Subprogramme 2 of the regional programme contributes to promoting a ...lanced and comprehensive approach to address the drug problem. That effort was ...pursued through, inter alia, a dedicated expert group meeting of specialists, nominated ...y Governments in the region. The expert group meeting was held in New Delhi in ...cember 2017. The meeting provided an opportunity for member States to share key ...itiatives undertaken by their Governments and to formulate the future thematic ...priorities.

...8. UNODC and the World Customs Organization are jointly implementing the ...ontainer Control Programme in South Asia with the aim of assisting Governments ...n creating sustainable enforcement structures at seaports, dry ports and airports. ...nder this initiative, the Programme provided and set up equipment and resources to ...the Air Cargo Control Unit at the Dhaka Customs House, including the state-of-the-art HazMat ID 360 device. The device is a portable chemical identification system ...that provides fast and comprehensive in-field analysis of unknown solids, gels and ...liquids to emergency responders. Through an intensive training workshop held in Dhaka, 12 officials from customs in Bangladesh learned how to utilize the device.

89. In 2017, UNODC initiated a project to reduce drug-related problems by facilitating and strengthening the engagement of law enforcement agencies with the ...g user community at the border of India with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal.

IV. National efforts and bilateral cooperation

90. According to the Office of National Narcotics Control Commission of China, the country continued its efforts to enhance the treatment and rehabilitation of drug users. In 2017, 260,000 drug users were admitted to community-based drug treatment facilities. In addition, the Government of China has been implementing a workplan on community-based treatment and rehabilitation of drug users (2016–2020) to provide such services to a larger number of people.

91. Effective 1 May 2018, the Central Narcotics Bureau of Singapore listed 21 substances, which had been scheduled in the Fifth Schedule of the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA), in the First Schedule of the same Act. Those substances include ADB-FUBINACA, 5-Fluoro-ADB and 2C-C.

92. The Government of Myanmar continued its effort to eradicate opium poppy in 2017. According to the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, a total of 3,533 ha of opium poppy was eradicated in 2017, representing a decrease of 53 per cent compared with 2016, continuing the decline that started in 2015. As in previous years, most of the eradication occurred in South Shan (85 per cent). The decline in eradication since 2015 follows the decreasing cultivation trend.

93. India signed a memorandum of understanding on drug-related matters with 13 countries and bilateral agreements with 24 countries. Senior-level talks are being held with Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

94. The Government of Bangladesh set up liaison offices in border areas to promote cooperation with India and Myanmar in counter-narcotics operations. Furthermore, State-level bilateral meetings were held with the neighbouring countries to prevent smuggling of methamphetamines (commonly known in the region with the name "yaba"). During the meetings, lists of traders and clandestine factories of narcotics production in India and Myanmar were handed over with a call to take necessary steps to cease this phenomenon.

95. The media have reported that the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka pledged to bring stricter laws to curb drug trafficking and use. The youth are a high priority area, with many being arrested in cases for possession of illicit drugs. A number of different cases were reported in which crystalline methamphetamine, cocaine, hashish and heroin were seized from foreign nationals at Bandarnaike International Airport. Cannabis originating in Kerala was seized at various points. Dealing with drug trafficking in prisons remains a problem as large quantities of drugs were believed to have been smuggled into the penitentiaries in 2017. Large quantities of glyphosate along with some other precursor chemicals were seized in Sri Lanka. In a public event, the police destroyed 900 kg of cocaine that was seized during 2017.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

96. The challenges posed by methamphetamine, heroin and related chemical precursors in South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific are so significant that no country can face them alone.

97. Potential heroin production in Asia continued to increase and coincided with the increasing acreage devoted to opium poppy cultivation in the region. The persistent demand for opiates, coupled with the lack of development assistance and alternative income sources for opium poppy growers, have been driving factors for the high levels of opium poppy cultivation.

98. Substantial amounts of illicitly produced precursor chemicals are being continuously diverted and trafficked in Asia. Attributable in part to the booming

chemical industry in the region, the wide availability of precursor chemicals for both synthetic drugs and opiates is a significant challenge for Member States.

99. There is a need to promote interregional cooperation to counter drug trafficking in the context of the southern route, which would help to raise awareness among Member States of the key impact of Afghan opium production in terms of demand and supply.

100. Use of the Internet for drug trafficking, including the use of dark web, has emerged as a major challenge for law enforcement agencies worldwide. There is an urgent need to increase awareness of law enforcement agencies and policymakers about the necessity to develop adequate regulations regarding drug trafficking activities conducted over the Internet. A systematic capacity-building initiative for improving the knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers in relation to this issue is highly recommended.

101. There is a need to further promote human rights-based approaches to handle the drug problem, emphasizing the human aspects of the problem rather than the punitive response.

102. In some cases, enforcement agencies lack sufficient technical capacity and expertise to deal with issues such as new psychoactive substances, the investigation of drug trafficking activities conducted over the Internet, the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs and other issues. Such agencies are also affected by a shortage of personnel trained to address those issues.

103. There is a need to educate people on drug abuse, to address outdated beliefs and remove prejudices that present barriers to rational use. Public education programmes that focus on the ill effects of the misuse of pharmaceutical preparations should be further enhanced.

104. The system for the dispensation of medication through pharmacies, in particular in South Asia, needs to be improved, in order to prevent the diversion of controlled medicines. Bar coding should be made mandatory to enable the tracing of medicines in the supply chain. There is a need to increase the number of inspections so as to improve the monitoring and supervision of retail pharmacies.

105. In line with recommendations contained in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, enhanced coordination between drug demand reduction and supply reduction agencies is crucial, as is the strengthening of a balanced, health-centred approach to drug control.

B. Recommendations

106. Member States may wish to consider multilateral and multifaceted approaches to addressing challenges posed by illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in South Asia, East Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific, including by:

(a) Further strengthening efforts to building awareness among the general public, especially young people, teachers and parents, about the growing public health concerns associated with the abuse of drugs (including pharmaceuticals preparations), as well as promoting evidence-based prevention standards by engaging schools, families and communities;

(b) Increasing the capacity of national authorities to gather and share data and information on illicit drugs effectively, in particular the extent of drug use and its implications, such as drug-related deaths, as such data are largely unavailable;

(c) Improving data collection mechanisms used for estimating requirements for controlled medicines;

(d) Establishing a partnership with the pharmaceutical industry to control the diversion of pharmaceutical preparations and formalizing the terms of such a partnership by establishing coordination mechanisms at the national level that would

bring together all relevant government agencies and the private trade and industry sectors, so as to facilitate information and intelligence-sharing with trading partners, thereby leading to better coordination of regulatory, medical and pharmaceutical practices;

(e) Strengthening relevant legal frameworks to reflect current developments in illicit drug markets and, for those Member States that have not yet done so, ratifying or acceding to the international drug control treaties and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;

(f) Enhancing the knowledge and skills of law enforcement officers, in particular in countries with limited resources and capacity, to investigate and prosecute drug trafficking offences more efficiently, through the provision of appropriate training on drug and precursor trafficking, as well as specialized training initiatives, including on the use of the Internet for drug trafficking purposes;

(g) Continuing to strengthen coordination and cooperation between national enforcement and regulatory agencies to facilitate the sharing of information and ensure the effective implementation of laws, regulations, policies and programmes;

(h) Enhancing support for mechanisms for cross-border and regional cooperation on drug matters, including relevant sectoral bodies of ASEAN, the memorandum of understanding on drug control in the Greater Mekong subregion and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, as well as through bodies including the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation;

(i) Further strengthening the functions of the border liaison office mechanisms in order to interdict and act upon the movements of illicit drugs and precursors across land borders, through enhanced cross-border and inter-agency cooperation;

(j) Developing similar approaches in selected ports, by strengthening container control mechanisms and inter-agency cooperation, to improve the capacity to interdict maritime traffic in illicit drugs and related precursors by relevant port authorities;

(k) Further strengthening the capacity of national forensic laboratories to detect narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances;

(l) Enhancing drug and precursor identification and profiling capacity through the development of infrastructure, training and networking, including by engaging with the chemical industry;

(m) Strengthening regular and rapid intelligence and operational data-sharing among law enforcement authorities in the region in order to respond to organized criminal groups effectively through joint operations;

(n) Increasing investments in promoting evidence-based research and approaches, such as drug use surveys and thematic assessments (including among women and in prisons), and strengthening data collection and analysis mechanisms, while collecting epidemiological data on an ongoing basis and sharing them among various agencies dealing with drug-related matters;

(o) Supporting the implementation of evidence-based drug use prevention policies and programmes;

(p) Strengthening appropriate intervention strategies through regular outreach programmes among the most vulnerable and at-risk populations, such as injecting drug users, who are particularly susceptible to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis B and C, as well as continuing to raise awareness among drug law enforcement officers regarding the needs of drug users and related health concerns;

(q) Transitioning, where applicable, from the model of compulsory drug treatment centres towards community and voluntary services, since such

evidence-based approaches are more effective than incarceration in addressing the harmful consequences of drug abuse;

(r) Taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of women and girls in the context of the world drug problem.

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